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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT MILLS SWEARS IN FIRST MINISTERS AS
PARLIAMENT CONTINUES VETTING PROCESS

REF: ACCRA 00057

¶1. (U) Summary. President Mills has sworn in ten of his new ministers, in a ceremony where he asked them to give selflessly for the country and to avoid ostentatious lifestyles. An additional four ministers received parliamentary approval on February 18. Parliament continues the process of vetting President Mills' ministerial appointments, with others expected to receive approval in the days ahead. Mills has already replaced his Ministry of Works appointee, Moses Asaga, due to Asaga's involvement in a controversial plan to award parliamentarians a substantial end of service package. Mills' candidate for Foreign Minister, Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni, was subject to opposition criticism for an unresolved 2004 report alleging his involvement in the loss of state funds. Mumuni is still expected to be sworn in, however he is one of the few ministers not yet approved by Parliament. Mills' team represents a balance of regional, ethnic and religious interests, and includes a member of the People's National Convention Party, part of a deal to obtain PNC parliamentary support, necessary to insure NDC control of a closely balanced parliament. The first group of Mills' appointments were discussed in REFTEL; this cable continues with additional brief biographies. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni. Mumuni is a trusted confidant of President Mills who was his vice-presidential running mate during the 2004 race. Mumuni was Minister of Employment in the Rawlings administration, and served as an MP, and prior to that, as a judge. He is an attorney by profession. Mumuni's vetting by parliament saw a walkout by NPP committee members, in protest over a libel action he initiated against a newspaper for reports it carried about a 2004 report by the Auditor General accusing him of loss of state funds in the operation of his ministry. The report surfaced in 2004 when Mumuni became Mills' running mate, several years after he left the ministry. Charges were never brought against Mumuni, however, nor was he asked by the previous government to explain the alleged charges. Mumuni is a Dagomba, from the Northern Region.

3. (U) Minister of Defense Lt. General Joseph Henry Smith (rtd.). Smith, age 63, is a retired career officer who served as Chief of Army Staff, Commander of the Second Infantry Brigade, Director of Military Training and commanding officer of the Field Engineering Regiment. He was also Ghana's Military Attaché in Washington from 1988 to 1992. Smith is respected by fellow officers. He and Mills are close friends, a status that did not help the General's career during the NPP government, where he was passed over for assignments. He has helped Mills to nurture ties with the military. Like Mills, he is a Fante, and was born in the Western Region. Smith is married to an Egyptian and is a convert to Islam.

¶4. (U) Minister of Finance Dr. Kwabena Duffour. A respected

economist, Duffour, age 66, was Governor of the Bank of Ghana from 1997 to 2001. Duffour holds a B.A. in Economics from the University of Ghana and an M.B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. from Syracuse University, where his doctorate was in International Finance. He has banking experience, rising from Director of Research and Chief Economist to be Managing Director of the Ghana Commercial Bank, a position he held from 1992-1995. Duffour has in the past supported the Convention People's Party, but he has been a major NDC supporter since the 2004 election. He is well connected in international financial circles, and has a moderate, pro-business philosophy. As head of the Bank of Ghana, the country's central bank, Duffour was widely acknowledged to have brought stability to the cedi. Duffour is an ethnic Ashanti, from a region that voted heavily for the NPP during the December elections.

¶15. (U) Minister of Roads and Highways Joseph Gidisu. Gidisu is a teacher by profession, but has worked for the Ghana National Association of Teachers, a trade union. He has served in parliament for three terms, representing a constituency in the southern Volta Region. Roads and Highways is a new ministry whose responsibilities previously were part of the Ministry of Transportation.

¶16. (U) Minister of Water Resources, Works and Housing, Albert Abongo. Abongo replaces fellow Upper East Region MP Moses Asaga, whose nomination was revoked following a public outcry over Asaga's signing of documents authorizing end of service financial awards to former MPs and President Kufour. Abongo is a first term MP, age 49, and a civil engineer. By replacing Asaga with Abongo, Mills is able to keep regional and ethnic balance in his cabinet.

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¶17. (U) Minister for Youth and Sports Muntakar Mubarak Muhammed. Muhammed is a second term MP representing Asawase, a Muslim majority constituency in the Ashanti city of Kumasi and the only NDC seat in the nation's second largest city. His appointment may be a calculated effort on the part of Mills to reach out to Muslim youth, particularly in urban areas, in order to maintain the substantial electoral support this demographic provided the NDC. Muhammed has limited administrative experience, which could affect his performance in the job. Muhammed participated in a recent State Department International Visitor Leadership Program for Young Muslim leaders. He is an ethnic Dagomba. The Ministry of Youth and Sports is a new portfolio, merging sections previously housed in the Employment and Education Ministries.

¶18. (U) Minister of Agriculture and Food Kwesi Ahwoi. Kwesi Ahwoi is a technocrat, although one with particular influence with President Mills, as he is one-third of the Ahwoi brothers, a family that forms their own power block within the NDC. The Ahwoi family is a major financial benefactor of the party. The Ahwoi's are believed to have recommended Mills as a potential vice presidential candidate to former President Rawlings, something for which Mills has been grateful ever since. Kwesi Ahwoi was director of the Ghana Investment Promotion Center under Rawlings. He has a background in business and economics, and in recent years has been a consultant on privatization in Uganda. Kwesi Ahwoi is a brother of Kwamina Ahwoi, who was a long-time Foreign Minister under President Rawlings.

¶19. (U) Minister of Information Sabah Zita Okaikwei. Okaikwei is a rising star in the NDC, although she failed to win election in 2008 to a parliamentary seat in Greater Accra. She is an attorney with a reputation for being an able manager. She is an ethnic Ga, and has the support of Accra's Ga leadership.

¶10. (U). Minister of Health Dr. George Sipa Yankey. Dr. Yankey is an attorney, academic and administrator, although he has no previous experience in health care management. He

was the Chief Executive of the Ghana Trade and Investment Gateway Program, a government office that offered tax and other incentives for private sector investment in Ghana. Yankey served in government under President Rawlings; he served time under President Kufuor, when he was jailed for crimes "causing a financial loss to the state" following a scandal involving a rice growing scheme. Yankey was released by President Kufuor in 2003, and received a full pardon at the end of 2008, allowing him to again hold high office. There is some question as to his actual involvement in the scheme.

¶11. (U) Minister of Chieftaincy and Culture Alexander Asum-Ahensah. A teacher by profession, he is a second term MP representing a constituency in the Brong-Ahafo region.

12, (U) Ministers at the Presidency Kalutie Alhassan and Azong Alhassan (no relation). Kalutie Alhassan, 61, is a newly elected member of Parliament. She is from the Upper West Region. Azong Alhassan, 43, is also a first term MP, from the Upper East Region. He is also a member of the People's National Party (PNC), which draws its limited support from northern Ghana. Mills' decision to include him was part of a compromise to gain the support of the two PNC MPs, necessary to ensure that the NDC was able to have the barest control over Parliament. We have little information about either minister. While holding the title of minister, neither is expected to sit in the cabinet. Ministers at the Presidency often represent the President at ceremonial events.

¶13. (U) Comment. The remaining ministers should be sworn in within the next week. Mills can now begin the consultative process necessary as the first step toward appointing deputy ministers. Under Ghana's constitution, the cabinet can have a maximum of nineteen members, including the President and Vice President, meaning that some ministers will not sit in the cabinet. Mills has done a credible job of balancing the many competing interests in Ghanaian politics, such as region, religion and ethnicity, and the number of complaints about exclusion have been relatively few. End Comment.

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